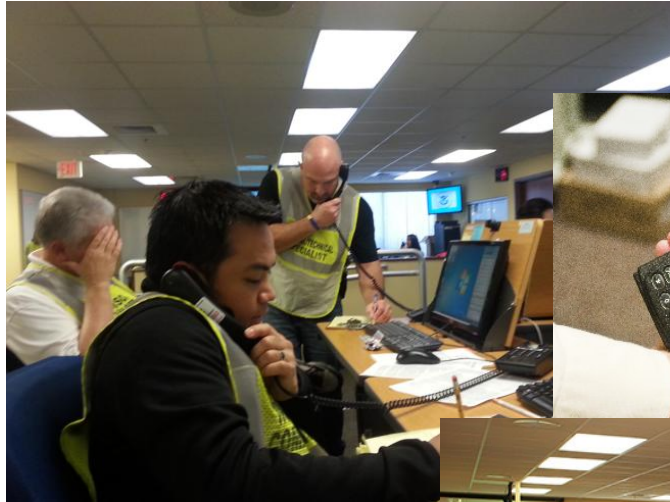# Internal and External Communication During A Large-Scale Event

Module 5

Objectives

Purpose:

Without communication, there would be no direction during a large-scale incident. This module will define communication and assist in the understanding of internal and external communication.

- Define communication
- Share situational awareness
- Detect risks of information sharing
- Identify personnel to share critical case information with
- Express the importance of plain language during a disaster
- Distinguish which tools of communication are appropriate during an incident

Communication Basics

Communication

- Disaster communication is a way of collaborating and sharing information with other entities during a large-scale event to organize an appropriate response.

- It is important for public safety agencies such as:
  - Law enforcement
  - Emergency medical services (EMS)
  - Fire services
  - Emergency management

- To provide and maintain communications with the hospital before, during, and after an emergency.

(Rouse, 2018)

Situational Awareness

- Situational awareness involves the deliberate observation, understanding, and likelihood of events in a healthcare environment. Changes to standard hospitalization work that prioritize efficiency can cause unintentional blindness to hazards that are in plain sight.

- Ways to improve your situational awareness:
  - Identify elements within your environment
  - Trust your instincts
  - Avoid complacency
  - Be alert
  - Continually assess the situation
  - Monitor the performance of others

(Farnan, 2016; BeSurvival, 2018)

Question 1:

True or False?

Disaster communication is a method of collaborating and sharing information in order to respond appropriately to a situation.

Question 1:

True or False?

Disaster communication is a method of collaborating and sharing information in order to respond appropriately to a situation.

The correct answer is TRUE.

Question 2:

Situational Awareness . . .

Select all that apply.

A. Involves the likelihood of an incident to occur

B. Keeps all staff and visitors alert

C. Is only applicable in a healthcare environment

D. Can be improved upon

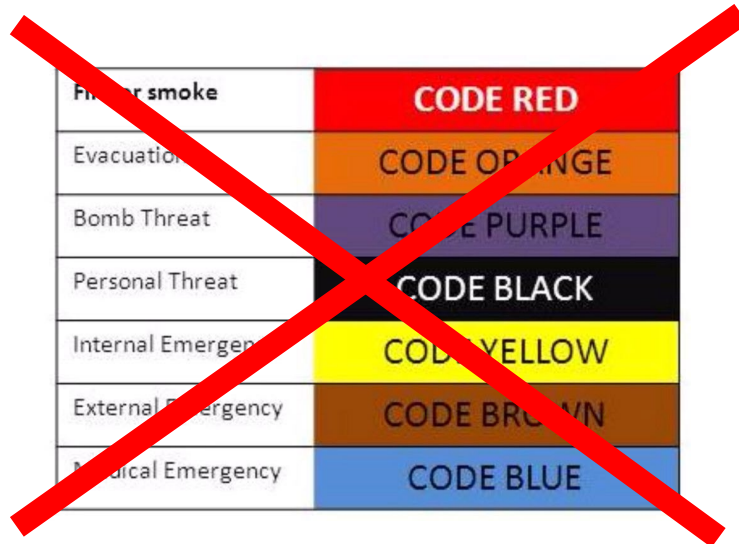E. Can only benefit adults

Question 2:

Situational Awareness . . .

Select all that apply.

A. Involves the likelihood of an incident to occur
B. Keeps all staff and visitors alert
C. Is only applicable in a healthcare environment
D. Can be improved upon
E. Can only benefit adults

The correct answer is A, B, and D.

Emergency Codes

- Every hospital has their own standard of work when it comes to coding emergencies.

- Many healthcare organizations are starting to veer away from color-coding incidents, and are moving forward with plain language.

- Plain language ensures transparency to staff and visitors.

Fire or smoke	**CODE RED**
Evacuation	**CODE ORANGE**
Bomb Threat	**CODE PURPLE**
Personal Threat	**CODE BLACK**
Internal Emergency	**CODE YELLOW**
External Emergency	**CODE BROWN**
Medical Emergency	**CODE BLUE**

Plain Language for Disasters

It is crucial that responders and incident managers use plain language. "There simply is little or no room for misunderstanding in an emergency situation" (Coiera, 2006).

- Use of plain language is required for multi-agency, multi-jurisdiction and multi-discipline responses, such as large-scale incidents and exercises.

- Plain language will allow those in the hospital to have a basic understanding of the emergency and the ability to protect themselves without needing further direction from staff.

- Current research suggests that plain language codes reduce the anxiety an emergency has on patients, visitors, and staff.

(Coiera, 2006; Prickett & Bellino, n.d.)

Collaboration

Collaboration during an emergency is vital to success. The National Disaster Recovery Framework states, "A coordinating structure that facilitates communication and collaboration among all stakeholders, guidance for disaster recovery and the overall process which communities can capitalize opportunities to rebuild stronger, smarter and safer" (FEMA, 2018)

- It is important for the organization to build relationships with key stakeholders prior to a disaster so they can provide support when an incident occurs.

- Examples of key stakeholders :
  - Healthcare coalitions
  - Other local hospitals and healthcare entities
  - Public health agencies
  - First responder agencies
  - Volunteer groups (e.g., American Red Cross)

  - Hotel management
  - Supply chain partners
  - Local transportation
  - Local universities

(FEMA, 2018)

Question 3:

True or false?

The best time to begin collaborating with stakeholders is after an emergency has occurred.

Question 3:

True or false?

The best time to begin collaborating with stakeholders is after an emergency has occurred.

The correct answer is FALSE.

Communication Barriers

Communication is continuously a factor of improvement in the health field. Effective communication is agreed upon and understood by both sides. It is important to recognize the barriers the health system faces today:

- Language barriers
- Cultural barriers
- Health literacy barriers

(Lorday, 2017)

Question 4:

True or false?

Limited English proficiency is a potential barrier to effective communication.

Question 4:

True or false?

Limited English proficiency is a potential barrier to effective communication.

The correct answer is TRUE.

Question 5:

Why is the use of plain language during disasters important?

Select the correct multiple choice answer.

A. Reduction in anxiety of those who hear communications

B. Reduction of misunderstandings among multi-disciplinary partners

C. Increase in those taking instructed protective measures

D. A & B

E. All of the above

Question 5:

Why is the use of plain language during disasters important?

Select the correct multiple choice answer.

A. Reduction in anxiety of those who hear communications

B. Reduction of misunderstandings among multi-disciplinary partners

C. Increase in those taking instructed protective measures

D. A & B

E. All of the above

The correct answer is E.

Internal Communication Considerations

Emergency Contact Checklist

- Ensure emergency contact list and response plans are up to date

- Have adequate communication tools in place
  - If devices are wireless, ensure charging capabilities

- Know the appropriate internal and external contacts
  - Hospital supervisor
  - Command Center
  - Dispatch

- Ensure designated contacts are accessible during an emergency on-site and off-site

Sharing Information

Information can quickly change during a disaster. The key to information sharing is ensuring staff and visitors are not only informed during a disaster, but are informed of the plans and procedures in place before a disaster occurs. This prepares the organization for better health outcomes.

Goals of information sharing:

- Identify and follow mass communication plan
- Know designated evacuation locations
- Ensure all patients and visitors are safe
- Be aware of your departmental responsibilities
- Know the appropriate personnel to contact in the case of an incident

Ways to Share Information

- Early and frequent communication with patients, visitors, and staff can prevent alarm and ensure an orderly plan

- Key organizational stakeholders (executives, departments involved, and other decision makers) must know what response efforts are being taken, and if any further support is needed to manage relief

- Communicating outside your health system is also extremely important. Platforms for health messaging include:
    - Press releases
    - Media interviews
    - Internet articles
    - Social media
    - Town hall forums

- External communication should be coordinated through your facility's public information mechanism

(Kapur, 2014)

Information Sharing Mitigates Risk

- It is important for staff to know the health risks/ diseases based on the disaster environment

- Staff need to be informed on how best to counsel patients

- Hospital personnel want to know how they can stay informed of emerging disease hospital trends

- Gaps in a disaster communication plan such as complex processes can confuse staff and increase vulnerability

- Information sharing is crucial with the public as well as to ensure comfort and eliminate fear

(Kapur, 2014)

Informal Communication

Informal messages, which have variable structures, include voice and e-mail message. At times, informal communication may be covered even by glance, movement or smile.

- Informal communication is built around the social connections of members in the organization

- Informal communication does not flow with the lines of authority

- Informal communication occurs to meet the personal needs of the members of the organization

(Communicationskill, n.d.)

Formal Communication

"Communication takes place through the formal channels of the organization structure along the lines of authority established by the management."[1]

Formal communication is generally in written form and may include any of the following:

- Policies
- Manuals: procedures and rule books
- Memoranda
- Laboratory results
- Official meetings
- Computer-generated alerts
- Reports
- Hospital discharge summaries

[1](Communicationskill, n.d.)

Formal Communication (continued)

The advantages of formal communication are:

- Helps the delegation of responsibilities
- Assists in maintaining an authority relationship in the organization

The disadvantages of formal communication are:

- Can generally consume time
- Can be cumbersome
- Leads to a good deal of distortion at times

(Communicationskill, n.d.)

Question 6:

Rob and his boss had a brief encounter during Rob's lunch break. His boss said, "You're going to finish that report by Monday, right?" Rob nervously smiled and shrugged.

This is an example of which form of communication?

A. Informal – no formal agreement was signed or agreed upon.

B. Formal – His boss gave him a date to complete the report, and Rob agreed to it.

C. None of the above

Question 6:

Rob and his boss had a brief encounter during Rob's lunch break. His boss said, "You're going to finish that report by Monday, right?" Rob nervously smiled and shrugged.

This is an example of which form of communication?

A. Informal – no formal agreement was signed or agreed upon.

B. Formal – His boss gave him a date to complete the report, and Rob agreed to it.

C. None of the above

The correct answer is A.

Personnel Briefing

It is crucial to keep personnel up-to-date and connected during a large scale incident.

- Some key topics that may be included in a situation briefing are:
    - Daily updates
    - Situational changes
    - New personnel to the scene
    - Supply chain management
- Ensure that:
    - All organizational facilities are included in briefings
    - Include internal and external personnel

(FEMA, 2014 p. 9-11).

Debriefing

Debriefing is an imperative strategy in order to learn from mistakes and improve health performance. Debriefing is recommended after real-life incidents, drills, and exercises.

The framework for event debriefing includes:

- Clear communication
- Understand roles and responsibilities
- Maintain situational awareness
- Distribute workload effectively
- Ask for and offer help when needed
- Make, mitigate, or correct health system errors

(U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2019)

Debriefing (continued)

To be effective, debriefing must be facilitated in a supportive learning environment.

Debriefing considerations:

- Implement clear communication
- Debrief with the purpose of identifying errors and strategizing possible solutions
- Do not place blame on the errors made
- Be descriptive
- Analyze errors and prioritize critical safety concerns
- Summarize the main learning points and how they can be applied to future health practices
- Provide follow-up action items with a clear understanding of responsibilities

(U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2019)

Question 7:

Debriefing . . .

Select all that apply.

A. Is an imperative strategy

B. Is recommended after real-life incidents

C. Is most beneficial to hospital staff

D. Allows staff to make, mitigate, or correct health system errors

E. None of the above

Question 7:

Debriefing . . .

Select all that apply.
A. Is an imperative strategy
B. Is recommended after real-life incidents
C. Is most beneficial to hospital staff
D. Allows staff to make, mitigate, or correct health system errors
E. None of the above

The correct answer is A, B, and D.

Communication Tools

Devices to Receive Disaster Communication

- Overhead paging
- Emailing
  - Mass email
  - Personal email
- 800 mHz radios
- Secure messaging application
- Emergency red phones
- Satellite phone
- Hospital phones
  - Hospital-based desk phones
  - Hospital-based cell phones
- Personal cell phones
  - Text messaging
  - Digital notifications
  - Automatic voice notifications

Mass Disaster Messaging

Many hospitals use established notification systems. These systems may be set up to send disaster notifications to all or select hospital staff. They may also organize notification communication and coordination for incidents requiring regional response.

Mass messaging to identified groups of staff likely is appropriate when:

- The overall goal is to reduce excessive noise within the hospital

- The situation requires specific staff have immediate notice for response

- The patient population may be considered easily impulsive, such as behavioral patients

(Florida Hospital Association, 2014)

Overhead Paging

Overhead hospital paging likely is appropriate when:

- The situation requires all or many building occupants hear the notice
  - Example: "Testing fire alarms on floor 4, no action needed."
- The situation requires additional or follow-up information
  - Example: "Technology downtime, if you are experiencing technological issues, please call 876-986-4456."
- The situation requires an immediate response from all staff
  - Example: "Missing child, all staff should proceed to doors, stairwells and emergency exits."

Plain language should be used when a serious safety event is occurring

- Example: "There is a fire on floor 8, please evacuate the hospital immediately."

(Florida Hospital Association, 2014)

Question 8:

Which of the following is not appropriate information to share via mass disaster messaging?

Select the correct multiple choice answer.

A.   Telling staff where to report

B.   Instructing staff, patients, and visitors to evacuate

C.   Sharing clinical information about patients

Question 8:

Which of the following is not appropriate information to share via mass disaster messaging?

Select the correct multiple choice answer.

A.   Telling staff where to report

B.   Instructing staff, patients, and visitors to evacuate

C.   Sharing clinical information about patients

The correct answer is C.

Question 9:

One goal of mass disaster messaging is:

Select the correct multiple choice answer.

A. To reduce excessive noise within the hospital

B. To organize hospital shifts

C. To utilize resources

Question 9:

One goal of mass disaster messaging is:

Select the correct multiple choice answer.

A. To reduce excessive noise within the hospital

B. To organize hospital shifts

C. To utilize resources

The correct answer is A.

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